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SIPDIS

STATE PASS EPA FOR CAM HILL-MACON AND S.HOFFMAN  
STATE FOR OES/ENV JOHN THOMPSON

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: DEMARCHE ON MERCURY ISSUE AT UNEP

REF: (A) STATE 01897, (B) EMAIL: FEB 10, 2005

1. EST Counselor provided REFTEL demarche points to Andre Correa do Lago, Head of the Division of Environmental Policy and Sustainable Development at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Feb. 10. As outlined in email, Correa do Lago said the GOB would like to consider the opinions of other countries which will be expressed during the debate on this issue at the upcoming UNEP GC meeting in Nairobi. After that meeting, and further internal debate within the GOB, a decision will be made.

2. If you believe the old saying that "actions speak louder than words," then chances are Brazil will eventually support the U.S. proposal, since it is actively supporting the development of a voluntary action plan to control mercury contamination in waters along with other Amazon Basin countries. At two meetings entitled "Regional Cooperation on Mercury Contamination in the Amazon Basin" that have already been held, co-sponsored by the South American Environmental HUB, Brazil's Ministry of the Environment officials have taken a leadership role in efforts to develop an action plan.

3. Although Brazilian law expressly forbids the use of mercury in gold mining, mercury contamination from that source is prevalent. According to the expert Fausto Azevedo, current data indicates that atmospheric mercury emission in gold mining activities in Brazil are 77.9 tons per year, representing 67.3% of total mercury emissions in the country. Several studies have shown that levels of mercury in riverside populations are much higher than accepted by WHO standards.

4. A recent environmental magazine reported that Brazil's Minister for the Environment, Marina Silva, still suffers from the effects of mercury poisoning from her youth.

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